

COLORADO CANYONS NATIONAL CONSERVATION AREA
River Corridor Working Group Meeting Minutes
April 23, 2002

Attendees:

Russ Walker	Jan Francis	Paul Merluzzi
Gene Arnesen	Mark Francis	Jerry Nolan
Travis Baier	Ken Fulmer	Mark Peterson
John Bornham	Gary Hunt	Jane Ross
Ed Chamberlin	Sera Janson	Trisha Solberg
Lowell Clark	Tom Kleinschnitz	Julie Stotler
Steve Cohn	Pete Kolbensschlag	

Greetings and Introductions

Russ Walker called the meeting to order.

Working Group Discussions

The group viewed the videotape, sent by Colorado Congressman Scott McInnis, discussing the intent behind the Colorado Canyons National Conservation Area (CCNCA) and Black Ridge Canyons Wilderness Act of 2000, which designated the National Conservation Area (NCA) and provided framework for its management. Congressman McInnis clarified his intent on managing recreation on the river, by reiterating that the river is not part of the NCA, and the current planning process will not include managing recreation on the river. At the same time, the legislation does not affect, or change, the authority of the Grand Junction field office in managing river recreation.

Group discussion centered on what the group can manage and plan for in this planning process, since it has been determined that managing recreation on the river itself is not within the group's jurisdiction. The group can manage the strips of land running along the river and to the river's edge.

The brochure addressing river ethics and etiquette came up again, and the group was asked to continue to provide input to Tom Kleinschnitz on how to improve the brochure, as well as how to gear it specifically toward the river section running through the NCA. Tom will re-transmit the electronic copy of the brochure.

Some members of the group have concerns on separating the river from the CCNCA management plan. If this major conduit is ignored, issues could arise from unrestricted river use. The group specifically mentioned safety, user conflicts, and the ability to analyze both direct and indirect impacts in the Environmental Impact Statement that will accompany the plan. The group was reminded that regulations on river use are in effect, administered by the state of Colorado, and options on enforcement may exist, allowing for discussions in the planning process, e.g., the need for executing an agreement with the state for joint patrolling, and/or placing a full-time presence on the river. The group was advised that it may have the ability to voice this concern to the Advisory Council, which may carry the influence necessary for recommending to Congressional representatives the desire to plan for river use, including limits.

The group agreed that it does, however, have the ability to manage campsites along the river, and everyone was asked to envision what the area should look like in the future, as use increases. Group consensus showed little desire for numbered campsites, or a system that assigns campsites, at least not at this time. The heaviest use is during holidays, on weekends, and during duck-hunting season. Some concern was expressed that managing for peak use should not evolve into over-managing during periods of non-peak use.

It was pointed out that the group has so far talked about anecdotal evidence of visitor use and resource health, and that a baseline analysis should be developed to document the River Corridor's current status. With that benchmark in place, the group could then more easily determine rationale for setting usage thresholds that would trigger increased levels of management. Land Health Standards could be used for measuring and monitoring resource impact.

This led to a discussion on Benefits-Based Management, or BBM, incorporated into the Ruby Canyon/Black Ridge Integrated Resource Management Plan. BBM offered a method, utilizing user surveys, for determining when to apply Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) to recreation around the river. The survey's design would allow for polling the public's level of enjoyment after recreating in the River Corridor, as a way to determine if usage was reaching a level indicating that limits should be imposed on access or campsite availability. The previous planning effort using BBM engaged Northern Arizona University (NAU) for conducting visitor surveys. These surveys focused on what the visitors to the area felt were the greatest benefits experienced, and then determined from those survey results, ways to quantify them for developing limits. For instance, encountering more than 12 other groups on the river, on more than 85 percent of your visits, represents an unacceptable experience. NAU performed an initial survey in 1992 and returned last year (2001-2002) to conduct a follow-on survey for comparison. Preliminary results of the current effort were passed out to the group. Some displeasure was voiced on how questions were framed, as well as the size of the survey sample.

The next meeting scheduled for the Working Group is suppose to be its last, but Russ Walker asked the group to consider meeting a few more times. By further reviewing

and discussing the NAU work, a viable method may be determined for judging visitor satisfaction, as well as developing alternative management scenarios for the River Corridor.

Informal group consensus was achieved on the following issues:

- No permit systems
- No assigned campsites
- No formal campsite numbering or other identification system

Consensus was not reached on registering all river craft.

The Working Group's next meeting is scheduled for May 7, 2002, at 5:00 p.m. The first hour of the meeting will focus on the River Corridor Working Group, and the second hour will be a joint meeting of the River Corridor and Wilderness Working Groups for the purpose of discussing interrelated issues, such as access to Wilderness trails via the river and noxious weed management.

Action item: Determine the extent to which the CCNCA plan can manage camping in the River Corridor.

The meeting was adjourned.